THE Grounds of Unity IN RELIGION: OR AN EXPEDIENT For a general *CONFORMITY* AND *PACIFICATION*.

By a Gentleman of the Middle Temple.

Printed in the Year 1679.

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The grounds of Unity IN RELIGION, &c.

UNity and submission is desired of all Princes and Common-wealths, as that which preserves Peace and Happiness in all Societies, for a Nation full of discontents and Factions, is next door to Rebellion, and consequently Ruine.

One great foundation of Peace is the due submission of all parties as well Ecclesiastical as Civil, to the temporal Prince, as supream Governour in all causes, and subject to none but God.

And this may be yielded, and yet not a compleat satisfaction in the general; for by a tolleration in Religion, different Sects may possible submit for politick ends, though this unites not, but only palliates, which yet is better than a worse evil.

But that which breeds the perfect concord and compleat union is this, when the Ecclesiasticks, and again the people agree to, and embrace the publick establish'd Church-Discipline, without murmuring, not out of force, but love and good opinion of it.

To which end and purpose, it ought to be as rational and consonant to the Law of nature as possible, agreeing with the plain apprehensions of humanity and down-right sincerity of the commons, without specious circumstances or impertinencies, which the people think are but amuzements and sophistications in the worship of God; but yet also compliant with the ends of prudence, and order without affectation of Novelty on th'one hand, or superstition on th'other, and this will infallibly be of force, for being founded in reason, it will be applicable and comprehensive to all reasonable men.

For this is most certain, the Church was pure and plain at the beginning, without ceremonies and circumstances; and Christians met together humbly, decently, and Religiously, with hearty Prayers to God, and hearing of the word fervently Preached with

ſuch apprehenſiveneſs and reaſon, that they made the people willingly to reſign their blind and ſuperſtitious opinions to ſuch real and demonſtrated truths; preſſing them to ſearch the Scriptures, and their own Conſciences, whether thoſe things they taught were ſo or no; in this purity and ſincerity, were the Primitive times, with which their innocency and holineſs of life ſo prevail'd, that many Kings and Kingdomes in ſhort time embraced the Chriſtian Religion, and ſtrongly upheld it; but after, it grew to ſo much ſplendour and pomp, that Superſtition, Vanity and arrogance crept alſo by degrees into the Clergy, that ſoon dimn'd the Luſter, and abated the true glory of Religion, and was the cauſe of many diviſions.

For this is a Rule in the Diſcipline of the Church and Worſhip of God, that too much formality ſpoyls devotion, and makes men cold in the ſearches after truth; the more plain and free from ceremonies and circumſtantials it is, provided it be decent, the more pure and ſubſtantial it will prove, and the more ground for a general union; wherefore in all ſuch caſes, much care ſhould be taken that the great ſtumbling-blocks of diſcontent be taken away, for though they are of themſelves indifferent, yet when they bring much and conſiderable diſturbance, they then ceaſe to be indifferent as to peace and quietneſs, and ſo are better regulated or removed.

Now doubtleſs though Epiſcopacy is the pureſt, as well as the moſt antient Diſcipline of the Church, having obtained in all Chriſtian Churches of the world of, what ſort or ſect ſoever, for 1500 years together after Chriſt, and the Church of *England* at preſent is lookt upon to be the beſt regulated of all Epiſcopacy, and yet if there can be any more advantages given to it for the farther Improvement of Unity, from antient preſcription, right reaſon or modern example; doubtleſs it might be good to be put in Practice, for we ſhould ſtill aſcend to improvement and perfection, for the more comprehenſive and generally acceptable it is, the more firm and eſtabliſht it will be.

For there is nothing conduceth more to Unity and Peace than by taking off and reducing the general Factions of Religion, which is done by enlarging the boſome of the Church, and taking

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of things that are cavild at, provided only they are Circumſtantials, as commonly they are, and not the materials and Eſſentials of Religion; ſo would both the cavils ceaſe, and Sectaries alſo and of courſe fall of themſelves to the ground without more ado, and incorporate to the ſame Church with us unavoydably.

For the true way of Unity, is ſuch a compoſed mean of Church-Diſcipline, as may render the major part and generality of rational people ſatisfied, which may eaſily be done with us without altering the frame of government, or taring things to pieces, but only by joyning the two great Parties of this Nation together, (*viz.*) the *Epiſcopal* and *Presbiterian*, which parties are at leaſt nine parts in ten of the Nation, including all other Sects, which may be done by a little regulation, abating only ſome things and reforming others.

For Epiſcopacy and the ſame Diſcipline in general is well enough approved by the moſt, but as in all times of civil Government, Emendations and making Laws hath been for the better convenency of the publick according to the emergencies of things, and conjuncture of times and occaſions, ſo alſo is it convenient in the Eccleſiaſtical Regiment, for ſome things will be alwayes proper at ſome times, and ſome ages, that is not proper in the other; and ſo accordingly they muſt be remedied, for in an age or ſome long tract of time, mens manners and the conſtitutions of things alter extreamly, and ſo muſt have corrections proportionably.

And all people being now ſatisfied that the Church of *England* by Epiſcopacy is to be the ſtanding Government, being eſtabliſht by Parliament, and alwayes owned ſo by his Majeſty; if there be once a further comprehenſion of the Presbiterians in and according to that Government; all other parties will ſoon be quiet as too ſmall to ſtand in computation on the one hand, and on th'other hand the Church being thus regulated will bring in the reſt dayly alſo, ſo that ſome ſmall regulation and abatement of the very ſame Church-Diſcipline we have already, will work the deſired effect. And as for the other Diſſenters they may have ſome connivance, but no legal Liberty; for legal allowance will mak them impudent, and endeavour to encreaſe, whereas otherwiſe they will be humble and cautious.

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Wherefore unite those two parryes, and the Church is eſtabliſht, and much better, and ſtronger, than ever, this will not only oblige our Friends at home, but all the Proteſtants beyond Seas; and this may be done by the rule aboveſaid without alering the mode of Government, for we differ but in a few things in Diſcipline and none in Doctrine, they have left of themſelves the notion of Elders, and, if it were in their own choice, would direct moderate Epiſcopacy, and would concede yet very much more for the gaining of our friendſhip, and being one with us, which will be a very happy period of that long and great conteſt now never to be heard of any more.

To effect this, a few things will be ſufficient, as diſpencing with the Surplice, and part of an Oath in the Act of Uniformity, alſo the Croſſing in Baptiſm, and kneeling at the Sacrament left indifferent, and pluralities taken away; theſe things being abated, they would agree with all things elſe very well, and be as much or more for Epiſcopaſy than we our ſelves, and why ſhould not we deſire this alſo that will unite us ſo invincebly, wherefore ſhould we ſtick at ſuch little circumſtances to hinder ſo great a work; and as for taking away pluralities, there are but few ſober men of either party but heartily deſire it, it being that which makes ill thoſe which have too many, and hinders abundance of Learned men from preferment; it being prudence in Government, rather to provide convenient and comfortable preferments for many, than great preferments for few; and things thus remedyed and quallified will be ſo far from weakning the Proteſtant Intereſt, that it will raiſe it higher than ever, and make Epiſcopaſy ſtand upon a firm and everlaſting Baſis. I am confident theſe few things, laſt mentioned, will do the work; however if there were any other hindrances of the like nature, what matter were it to remove them for the Churches ſecurity, the advantage will ſoon be perceived, this will drown and take away the name of Presbytery as well as all nicknames of parties, and make them have no abettors nor underſtand how to beget a quarrel if they would themſelves.

Some may ſay it will be ill making alterations, but that is of ſome Extraordinary thing which diſcontents the major part of the Nation; but this is the contrary, for here the major part will not only be well pleaſed at it, but will alſo be advantaged: where then is the inconveniency of it? the Royal and Proteſtant party, if

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Ceremonies were abated, would not be diſoblig'd, or the leſs Subjects for it, they referring all ſuch Matters to the King & Parliament, and would be as well pleaſed in his Majeſties farther Directions in this, as they were with Queen *Elizabeth* before; for it is all one to them if the Government be ſatisfied, they acquieſs as well in taking of them away, as ſetting of them up, and more, becauſe they ſee, it's for making many Friends; Again, *the Presbiterians that were diſpleaſed before, are by this reconciled, which will on all the ſcores of Humanity and Chriſtianity, oblige them to be grateful to Eternity*; and for the Church of *England*, it will very much inlarge the boſome of it, Exalting it above all Diſputes about Diſciplines, making it ſo firm, that nothing can ſhake it.

And others may object, that if theſe things be granted, the Sectaries will deſire more and more ſtill, till they have pul'd down all Decencie, good Order, and Eccleſiaſtical Government, but this doth not follow, for by the ſame Rule, there can't be a motion to reform any thing amiſs whatſoever, but they ſhall ſtraight prevent it by a pretence of a deſtructive change, but this alters no groundwork or ſubſtantials in Diſcipline, only pruning off ſome ſuperfluities, for according to the common Maxime, take away the Cauſe, and the Effect ceaſeth; for Example, if a man putteth on Laces on his Linnen, or Garment, ſome will ſay they are too broad, others too narrow, others not fine enough, otherwiſe again no good pattern, when he that wears none gives no opportunity to be talked of, or for any body to be diſpleaſed with him. So its generally in all other things, the more plain and ſubſtantial it is, the better its liked, and ſo in Diſcipline, if they ſhould quarrel at Foundations and ſubſtantial things, they would render their party weak and themſelves ridiculous, wherefore for their own Credit and Chriſtianity, they would not unrip thoſe Sacred Tyes and Ligaments, but many Ceremonies and circumſtantials, common reaſon tels us, is liable to the cenſure of every common pretender under the notion of ſuperſtition, whilſt plainneſs and ſeriouſneſs in Religion, fills up all peoples hearts to applaude it, its no poliey to uphold things to be agued and diſputed at or cauſe differences, when taking of them away cureth the troubles without any more to do, cutting off the diſcontented Cavil.

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For the true ballance of the Church Government, is to have as few unnecessary obligations as possible, and to be free from all Cloggs in oppression of reason or conscience, but giving latitude, be comprehensive of the generality as much as may be, for all Artifices ought to be contrived for inlarging the bosome of the Church to the utmost Extent, and in cases of this nature private Animosities ought by every one to be laid aside for the publick Concern.

To be brief, all manner of inconvenient Church-rigour being thus calmed, how strong should we be in our selves, it would keep many strickt sort of people from going beyond Sea, blast all the designs of the Enemies of the Church, and oblige all sorts of Foreign, and home Protestants, making them flock to it, and cherish so moderate a Government, & would not scruple at Bishops, or any good Order, but would gladly joyn with them, as being questionless the best Government in the world; if truly regulated, and when once the great Ones and heads of Parties are obliged by state Prudence, the rest will soon crumble to nothing, by this all Sectaries will diminish, when once the apparent grounds of difference is taken away, so this would not only unite us for the present, but keep people from growing to be Schismaticks for the future, as well as increase the body of the Church, when they see it is not Ceremonies are stood on, as some incendiaries pretend, but instead thereof, so much willingness and plain-heartedness, to unite all people in the Worship of God. Thus shall the Church of *England* be more firmly establisht than ever, the people pleased and conformable, His Majesty feared of his Enemies abroad, and become strong in the affections of his Subjects at home; Trade also would soon revive and flourish, and not only the *Dutch*, but other Protestants also flock over with banks of Money, and Manufacturies, His Majesty by it gaining the hearts of all the Protestants of *Europe*, as well as their Trades and Merchandize, by endeavouring to establish, thus the purity of the Worship of God, easing of tender Consciences, and securing them more free in their persons, Religion, and Property, than any place in the world besides, which is that which increaseth the Trade and grandure of any Nation.

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